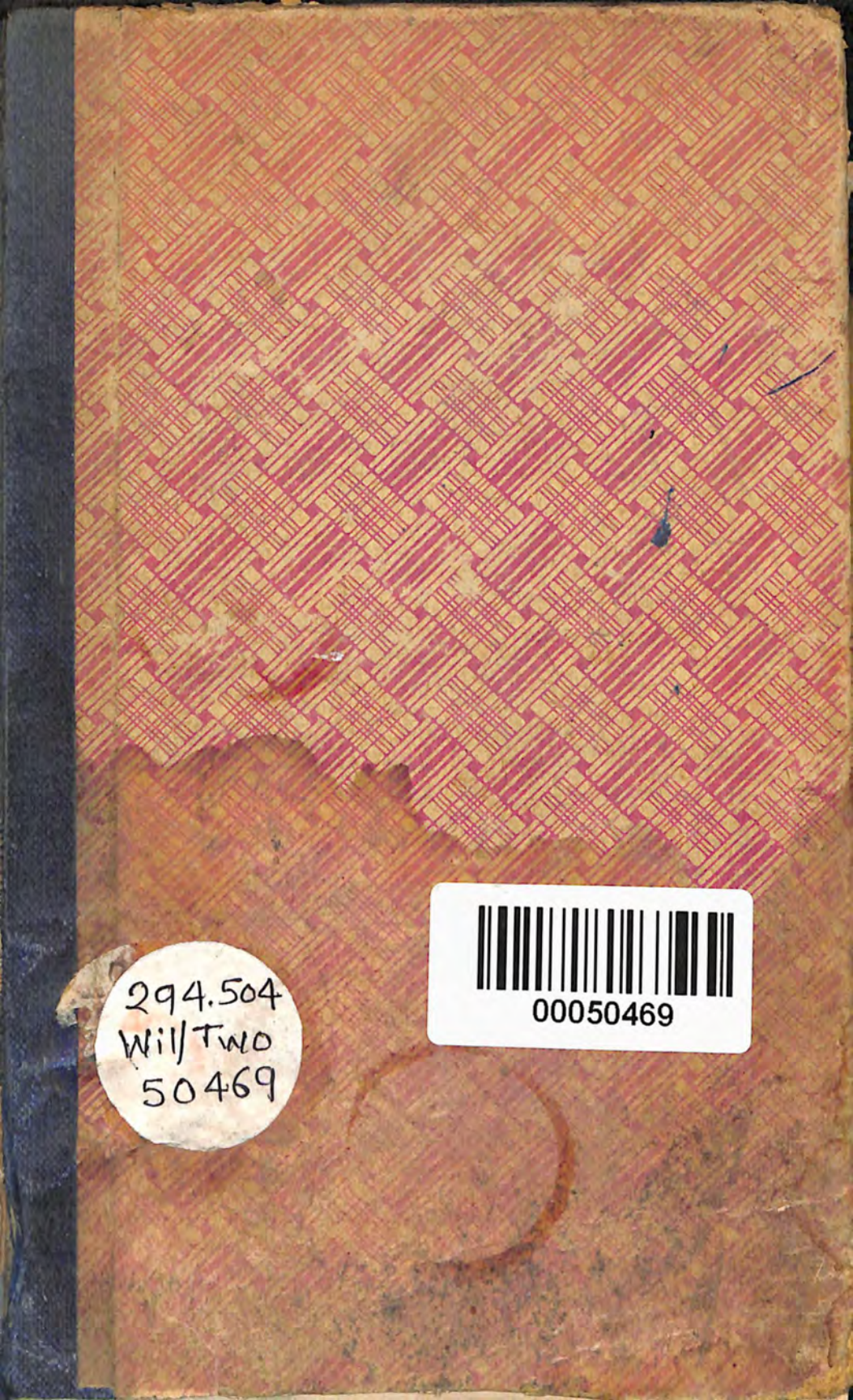
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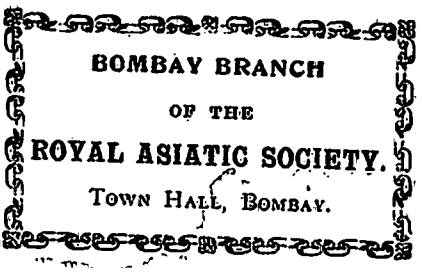

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TWO LECTURES

ON THE

RELIGIOUS PRACTICES AND OPINIONS

OF THE

HINDUS;

DELIVERED BEFORE

THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD,

On the 27th and 28th of February, 1840.

50469

BY

H. H. WILSON, M.A.

(OF EXETER COLLEGE),

BODEN PROFESSOR OF SANSCRIT, ETC.

OXFORD,

PRINTED BY T. COMBE, PRINTER TO THE UNIVERSITY: SOLD BY

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MDCCCXL.

1840

IN a Convocation, holden on Thursday the 13th of February, 1840, the following proposal, made through the Right Reverend The Lord Bishop of Calcutta, was submitted to, and accepted by the University.

Bishop's Palace, Calcutta, June 12, 1839.

To the Reverend the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford.

REV. MR. VICE-CHANCELLOR,

1. I am requested by a Gentleman of the Civil Service of the Hon. The East India Company, in this Presidency, to submit the proposal of a Prize for the Members of the University, if you should see fit to accept of the same.

2. The subject on which this Gentleman (who begs me to suppress his name) is desirous of proposing a prize, is thus described in a letter to myself.

"For the best refutation of Hinduism in its main systems, both exoteric, and esoteric; to consist of such arguments, and be conveyed in that form of address, which are most suited to Indian genius, modes of thinking, and state of knowledge, and most likely to carry conviction to the understanding and heart of the Indian Pundit; together with such a statement of the Evidences of Christianity as may be most suitable to the mental and moral character of learned Hindus, and the state of information among them; the whole treatise being so constituted, as, together with the more necessary and essential arguments, to furnish also, judiciously interwoven, those elementary principles of morals, natural theology, metaphysics, historical evidence, &c., &c., and those historical facts, which the perverted condition of the Hindu intellect, and its want of correct historical information, may render indispensable, in order to the clear apprehension of the reasoning which is to form the principal subject of the Treatise.

"Any considerations connected with the subject, which the writer may think interesting, and important to the European reader, but which have not a direct bearing on the primary object of the Treatise, (the conversion of learned and philosophical Hindus to Christianity,) might be thrown into an Appendix."

3. The gentleman has lodged Two Hundred Pounds sterling in the banking house of Messrs. Robarts, Curtis, and Co., which will be paid to your order, at a moment's

notice, by a check drawn by the Rev. D. Wilson, vicar, Islington, London.

4. The proposer leaves it entirely to the University to determine the classes of Students, or Members, to whom the prize should be proposed. He supposes that justice cannot be done to the subject in less than three or four hundred pages; and he wishes that the successful Candidate should print a certain number of copies of the Essay, at the direction of the University.

5. The gentleman further suggests that Mr. Professor Wilson, and Dr. Mill, late Principal of Bishop's College, Calcutta, might be advantageously referred to by persons intending to write for the prize, with respect to the best works to be consulted for information on the nature of Hinduism, and the state of sentiment and morals in India.

6. He states to me, also, that he is anxious to draw the attention of academical youth to the consideration of the welfare of India, and wishes the projected work to be adapted for learned Hindus, i. e. both such as are learned in their own religious and philosophical literature, and those who have received a good English education. The Treatise should, in short, be in such a form, as to be at once, without further preparation or modification, a suitable work to be put into the hands of the English-reading Natives, and also fit for translation into Sanscrit; and,

with the latter view, it would, we think, be advisable to have it written in the form of Dialogue, the different parts of the subject being introduced by questions or objections from a *pupil*, and expounded in his Teacher's reply.

7. But all these intimations are intended to be entirely subordinate to the judgment of yourself, Mr. Vice-Chancellor, and the Heads of Houses, and the Proposer of the Prize will be perfectly satisfied in whatever way his main object shall be carried into effect.

8. I cannot close this letter without tendering my grateful acknowledgments to the University for all their consideration to myself since my matriculation the 1st of May, 1798; and to assure them that it is with no slight feelings of gratification I find myself called upon, in this distant country, to be the channel of communication with them on so important and deeply interesting a subject.

I have the honour to be,

Mr. Vice-Chancellor,

Your obedient humble Servant,

D. CALCUTTA.

It was at the same time determined, That "the Candidates shall, at the time of delivering in their Compositions, be Members of the University, having their names upon the Books of some College or

Hall:—that the Compositions be delivered to the Registrar on or before the 14th day of January, 1842:—and that the Vice-Chancellor and Proctors, with such Assessors as they shall think proper to call in, be the Judges."

LECTURE I.

IT has always been my wish and intention to offer to those members of the University who may take an interest in the subject, a general view of the institutions and social condition, the literature and the religion of the Hindus. The purpose, although unfulfilled, is not abandoned. Various impediments have retarded its accomplishment, and still delay its execution; but I hope, at no very distant period, to be able to carry it into effect. In the mean time, the invitation which has been addressed to the University by the Bishop of Calcutta, and which, I am happy to think, has been accepted, to contribute to the religious enlightenment of a benighted, but intelligent and interesting and amiable people, has suggested to me the propriety and the duty of giving some earnest of my desire to render to any who may apply their talents and learning to the proposed task—a task peculiarly appropriate to a society equally eminent for piety and erudition—whatever assistance the direction of my studies, my personal knowledge of the Hindus, and the extent of my ability may qualify me to afford them.

The task that has been proposed to the members

of the University is twofold. They are invited to confute the falsities of Hinduism, and affirm to the conviction of a reasonable Hindu the truths of Christianity. For the second branch of this undertaking the qualifications are widely disseminated. Deep impressions of the importance of Christian truth, and of the obligation to extend it to the ends of the earth—knowledge of that truth, and skill to make it known—are not likely to be deficient in this University. For the effective performance, however, of the first branch of the undertaking, some preparation is requisite—some preliminary study is necessary—some information not yet sought for is to be obtained. It is obviously essential to know that which we engage to controvert. It is indispensable that we should be well acquainted with the practices and doctrines and belief, the erroneousness of which we would demonstrate; and in this respect whatever may be the zeal and the ability, the like extent of available fitness cannot at present be reasonably expected. Yet the plan submitted to the University requires this fitness, and judiciously requires it. Besides the general principles upon which the necessity of such competency is obvious, it is still more imperative in regard to the circumstances and character of those with whom we have to deal. The Hindus will not listen to one who comes amongst them strong only in his own faith and ignorant of theirs. "Read these translations," said a very worthy clergyman to a sect of religionists at Benares, who were already seceders from idolatrous worship, and were not indisposed for argument upon the comparative truth of different creeds. "We have no objection to read your books,"

was the reply, "but we will enter into no discussion of their contents with you until you have read ours." This was inconvenient or impracticable, and no further intercourse ensued. This is one instance out of many where precious opportunities have been lost, because the only means of communicating fully with the natives—conversancy not merely with their language but with their literature—has been wanting or incomplete; and with an acute and argumentative people like the Hindus you must satisfy them that they are in error before you can persuade them to accept the truth. To overturn their errors we must know what they are; and for the purpose of conveying to you some notion of their nature and extent, and of putting you in the way of acquiring more precise information on the subject, I have thought it possible that even some brief observations may be of use. With this hope I propose to give in this and a succeeding Lecture a general sketch of the principal religious practices and opinions of the Hindus.

The account which it is thus proposed to submit to you must be unavoidably of a very general nature. The interval that has elapsed since the invitation was accepted has not permitted the preparation of a very comprehensive detail; nor is the subject, perhaps, in that stage of its consideration in which minuteness of detail would be of advantage. What is now wanted, and that as early as possible, is some determinate direction in which inquiry may be prosecuted—some definite point to which the thoughts may be made to converge. In a topic necessarily unfamiliar to the customary tenor of academic study, it is not possible that any exact

ideas should have been yet formed as to the degree or kind of preparation that is requisite, and few are likely to be acquainted with the situation and sufficiency of those stores from which they must provide their outfit for an untried voyage. The scene is so new, the prospect so indistinct, that enterprise may lose heart, and zeal may languish in vain aspirations, unless something of a chart, however rude and imperfect, be laid before the adventurer whilst he yet hesitates to make his first advance. It is this help which it is my present purpose to supply, in the hope that some, who, although competent to do honour to themselves and the University, might shrink from encountering they know not what, may be induced, if the mist may be in some degree cleared away, to look a little nearer, advance a little farther into the now-seeming labyrinth, assured that every step they take, the path will become less intricate, and the goal be more perceptibly in view; assured, too—unless my own experience deceive me—that there will not be wanting on their journey objects, if not of beauty, yet of exceeding curiosity and interest, to enliven their way. and beguile them of the consciousness of fatigue.

The history of the Hindu religion, although not traceable with chronological precision, exhibits unequivocal proof that it is by no means of that unalterable character which has been commonly ascribed to it. There are many indications which cannot be mistaken, that it has undergone at different periods important alterations in both form and spirit. These are little heeded, have been little investigated, and are little known by even the most learned of the Brahmans. Some have been pointed

out by the late Hindu reformer Raja Rammohun Roy, but even he was unaware of their full extent, and they are of themselves fatal to the pretensions of the Hindu faith, as it now mostly prevails, to an inspired origin and unfathomable antiquity.

The oldest monuments of the Hindu religion are the Vedas. It is much to be regretted that we have not a translation of these works in any of the languages of Europe; if we had, they would no doubt, in like manner as the Koran of the Mohammedans and the Zend-avesta of the fire-worshippers of Persia, supply us with irrefutable arguments against the credibility of the religion of which they were once the oracles. A summary of the contents of the Vedas—as satisfactory as a summary can be—was published by Mr. Colebrooke, the most eminent of all our Sanscrit scholars, in the eighth volume of the Researches of the Asiatic Society of Bengal.[a] The account, with a variety of instructive dissertations on the religion, philosophy, science, and literature of the Hindus, has been reprinted in a Collection of Miscellaneous Essays;[b] published by Mr. Colebrooke, or rather for him, not long before his death. The text also, with a Latin translation of one book out of eight, of one of the Vedas, the Rig-Veda, has been printed by the Committee of the Oriental Translation Fund.[c] It was the work

[a] Asiatic Researches. Transactions of a Society instituted in Bengal, for inquiring into the History, &c., of India. 20 vols. 4to. Calcutta.

[b] Miscellaneous Essays, by H. T. Colebrooke. 2 vols. 8vo. London. Allen and Co. 1837.

[c] Rig-veda Sanhita. Liber Primus, 1 vol. 4to. London, Oriental Translation Fund. Allen and Co. 1838.

of Dr. Rosen, a distinguished oriental scholar, who died in the prime of life and in the spring of his fame. A portion of the same Veda has also been translated by the Rev. Mr. Stevenson, and published at Bombay.

From these authorities a tolerably correct notion may be formed of the character of the Vedas. They are four in number, Rich, Yajush, Saman, and Atharvan, or, as usually compounded, Rig-veda, Yajur-veda, Sama-veda, and Atharva-veda. The latter, however, differs, as far as it is known, materially in purport and even in style from the others; it is rarely met with, and is not uncommonly omitted from the specification of the Vedas even by early writers, who not unfrequently speak of the Vedas collectively as but *three*. It evidently enters in a less degree than the rest into the formation of the national religion as taught by the Vedas. Neither of the Vedas can be considered as a distinct work, composed upon a definite plan, having either a consistent method or a predominating subject. Each is an unarranged aggregate of promiscuous prayers, hymns, injunctions, and dogmas, put together in general, though not always, in similar succession, but not in any way connected one with the other. It is not at all unusual for even what is considered as the same hymn, to offer perfectly isolated and independent verses, so that they might be extruded without injury to the whole. In the belief of the Hindus, the Vedas were coeval with creation, and are uncreated, being simultaneous with the first breath of Brahmá—the creative power. This is sometimes questioned; but the opinion is universal that Brahmá was their author, and that they were

amongst the first created things. There are, however, legends of their having been lost; and there is one account of their recovery, which states that they were then taught to a number of Brahmans by a son of Brahmá. This refers, probably, to the period of their composition by different Brahmans. They themselves furnish evidence of their composition by different hands, and at different periods. Each hymn is said to have its Rishi—the sage by whom it was first communicated; and these Rishis comprise a variety of secular as well as religious individuals, members of the Kshatriya or military, as well as the Brahmanical order, who are celebrated at different æras in Hindu tradition. It is also admitted that the Vedas existed in a scattered form until the parts of which they now consist were collected and arranged in their actual form by a person of very equivocal origin—the son of Rishi, by the daughter of a fisherman, and therefore, properly speaking, of very impure caste—and who from his arranging the Vedas is known by the name of Vyása—the arranger. He is supposed by the Hindus to have lived about 5000 years ago. It seems not improbable that he or the school of which he is the reputed founder, flourished about thirteen centuries before the Christian era. He was assisted in his labour, it is reported, by various sages, and it is here again evident that the composition of the Vedas was the work of many hands—of a school or religious community which first reduced the straggling institutes and practices, and popular prayers and hymns of the people, into a compact and permanent authority. The proceedings of Vyása and his coadjutors, and the formation of various branches

from the main stem, or of subordinate and subsequent from one primary and principal school, are described by Mr. Colebrooke, and will also be found detailed in the Vishnu Purana,[d] of which a translation is about to appear from the press of the University.

In the state in which they are now found, the Vedas are each distinguishable into two portions—a practical and a speculative: the one still forms the chief basis of speculative opinion; the other is, except in a few particulars, obsolete.

The practical portion of the Vedas consists of little else than detached prayers addressed with a few exceptions to divinities no longer worshipped, some of whom are even unknown. There is one for instance named Ribhu, of whose history, office, or even name, a person might ask in vain, from one end of India to the other. The prayers have consequently gone out of fashion along with their objects, and when they are employed they are used as little else than unmeaning sounds, the language in which they are written differing much, both in words and construction, from the Sanscrit of later writings. In many parts of India the Vedas are not studied at all; and when they are studied it is merely for the sake of repeating the words; the sense is regarded as a matter of no importance, and is not understood even by the Brahman who recites or chaunts the expressions. Now this is in itself a vital departure from the sacred institutes of the

d The Vishnu Purana. A System of Hindu Mythology and Tradition, translated from the original Sanscrit. 1 vol. 4to. London. Murray. 1840.

Hindus, by which the first portion of life, the first of the four orders or stages through which all males of the three first castes, the Brahman, Kshatriya, and Vaisya, were peremptorily commanded to pass, was that of the religious student; the term of whose studentship was to be spent with a Brahman teacher of the Vedas, and the sole object of whose studies was the understanding of the Vedas. For a Brahman to be wholly ignorant of the Vedas was a virtual degradation. "A Brahman," says Manu, "unlearned in holy writ, is extinguished in an instant like dry grass on fire." "A twice born man (that is, a man of either of the three first castes) not having studied the Veda, soon falls, even while living, to the condition of a Sudra, and his descendants after him." It is also declared that a Brahman derives not that name from birth alone, but from his knowledge of the Vedas. According therefore to the letter of the law, there are very few Brahmans now in India who have a right to the respect and privileges which the designation claims.

The religion of the Vedas, as far as we are acquainted with it, differs in many very material points from that of the present day. The worship they prescribe is, with a few exceptions, domestic, consisting of oblations to fire, and invocations of the deities of fire, of the firmament, of the winds, the seasons, the moon, the sun; who are invited by the sacrificer if a Brahman, or by his family priest, if he is not a Brahman, to be present and accept the offering, either oiled butter, or the juice of the Soma, of a species of asclepias, which are poured upon the sacrificial fire, in return for which, they are supplicated to confer temporal blessings upon

the worshipper, riches, life, posterity; the short-sighted vanities of human desire, which constituted the sum of heathen prayer in all heathen countries.

The following is the second hymn of the Rig-Veda:

1. Approach, O Vayu (deity of the air); be visible: this Soma juice has been prepared for thee; approach, drink, hear our invocation.

2. Those who praise thee, Vayu, celebrate thee with sacred songs, provided with store of Soma juice, and knowing the season suitable for their oblations.

3. Vayu, thy assenting voice comes to the sacrificer, it comes to many through the offering of the libation.

4. Indra and Vayu, this juice has been prepared; come with benefits for us; verily the libation desires you.

5. Vayu and Indra, observe the libations, being present in the offerings, come quickly.

6. Vayu and Indra, mighty men, approach the priest of the sacrificer quickly, on account of his prayers.

7. I invoke Mitra (the sun), the source of purity; I invoke Varuna, able to destroy; both cherishing earth with water.

8. Mitra and Varuna, be pleased with this propitiatory offering; for to you, assuredly, do sacrifices owe their success, as the waters do their abundance.

9. Mitra and Varuna, all wise divinities, born for the benefit of multitudes, and multitudinously present, give efficacy to our acts.

The titles and functions of the deities commonly addressed in these invocations give to the religion of the Vedas the character of the worship of the elements, and it is not unlikely that it was so in its earliest and rudest condition. It is declared in some texts that the deities are only three; whose places are, the earth, the middle region, between heaven and earth, and the heaven; namely, fire, air, the sun. Upon this, however, seems to have been grafted some loftier speculation, and the elements came to be regarded as types and emblems of divine power, as there can be no doubt that the fundamental doctrine of the Vedas is monotheism. "There is in truth," say repeated texts, "but one deity, the Supreme Spirit." "He from whom the universal world proceeds, who is the Lord of the universe, and whose work is the universe, is the Supreme Being." Injunctions also repeatedly occur to worship Him, and Him only. "Adore God alone, know God alone, give up all other discourse;" and the Vedant says, "It is found in the Vedas, that none but the Supreme Being is to be worshipped, nothing excepting him should be adored by a wise man."

It was upon these and similar passages that Rammohun Roy grounded his attempts to reform the religion of his countrymen, to put down idolatry, and abolish all idolatrous rites and festivals, and substitute the worship of one God by means of prayer and thanksgiving. His efforts were not very successful, not so successful as they might have been, had he confined himself to their legitimate objects; but he involved himself in questions of Christian polemics and European politics, and

intermitted his exertions for the subversion of Hindu idolatry. He did not, however, labour wholly in vain; and there is a society in Calcutta, which although not numerous is highly respectable, both for station and talent, which professes faith in one only Supreme God, and assembles once a week, on a Sunday, to perform divine service, consisting of prayers, hymns, and a discourse in Bengali, or Sanscrit, on moral obligations, or the attributes and nature of the Deity. A leading preacher at those meetings, when I left India, was a learned Brahman, who was professor of Hindu law in the Sanscrit college of Calcutta: and another influential member, a man also of Brahmanical birth, of good family, and of property, set on foot, and I believe still continue, an English newspaper, called the Reformer, in which the opinions of the party, not only on religion, but on the measures of the government of India, are advocated, by natives solely, although in our language, with remarkable boldness and ability.

To return however to the purpose of the Vedas. It seems very doubtful, if at the time of their composition idolatry was practised in India: images of the deified elements are even now unworshipped, and except images of the sun, I am not aware that they are ever made. The personification of the divine attributes of creation, preservation, and regeneration, Brahmá, Vishnu, and Siva, originate no doubt with the Vedas, but they are rarely named, they are blended with the elementary deities, they enjoy no preeminence, nor are they ever objects of special adoration. There is no reason, from the invocations addressed to them in common with the air, water, the seasons, the planets, to suppose that

they were ever worshipped under visible types. Ministration to idols in temples is held by ancient authorities infamous; Manu repeatedly classes the priest of a temple with persons unfit to be admitted to private sacrifices, or to be associated with on any occasion; and even still, the priests who attend upon the images in public are considered as of a scarcely reputable order by all Hindus of learning and respectability. The worship of images is declared to be an act of inferior merit even by later authorities, those perhaps with which it originated, and it is defended only upon the same plea which has been urged in other times and other countries—that the vulgar cannot raise their conceptions to abstract deity, and require some perceptible object to which their senses may be addressed. "Corresponding to the natures of different powers and qualities," it is said, "numerous figures have been invented for the benefit of those who are not possessed of sufficient understanding." And again; "The vulgar look for their gods in water; men of more extended knowledge, in the celestial bodies; the ignorant, in wood, bricks, and stones." It is almost certain therefore, that the practice of worshipping idols in temples was not the religion of the Vedas.

The dwellinghouse of the householder was his temple: if qualified, he was his own priest; but this practice even among the Brahmans probably soon fell into desuetude, as they more extensively engaged in secular avocations, and it became almost universally the practice to retain a family priest. This is still the custom. Instead of being however a Brahman of learning and character, he is very commonly illiterate, and not always respectable. The office

has also undergone an important modification. The family priest was formerly also the Guru, or spiritual adviser of the family. The priest now rarely discharges that function, he merely conducts the domestic rites; and the Guru, to whom extravagant deference, such as is due tc deity alone, is paid, is a very different individual, very usually not a Brahman at all, but a member of some of the mendicant orders that have sprung up in comparatively modern times, a vagrant equally destitute of knowledge, learning, and principle.

Again; although Brahmá, Vishnu, and Siva are named in the Vedas, yet it is very doubtful if even the names of those incarnations and types under which they are now exclusively worshipped occur. Ráma the son of Dasaratha, Krishna the son of Vasudeva, are, it is believed, unnoticed in authentic passages of the Sanhita or collected prayers, and there is no mention of the latter as Govinda or Gopala the infant cowherd, or as the uncouth and anomalous Jagannath. The only form in which Siva is now worshipped, the Linga or Phallus, it is generally agreed, has no place whatever amongst the types and emblems of the mythos of the Vedas. It is clear therefore that the great body of the present religious practices of the Hindus are subsequent in time and foreign in tenor to those that were enjoined by the authorities which they profess to regard as the foundations of their system.

Some parts of the private and domestic ceremonial of the Vedas are however still in use, although mixed up with much extraneous matter. For these I may again refer to Mr. Colebrooke, who published originally in the fifth and seventh volumes of the

Asiatic Researches three papers on the religious ceremonies of the Hindus and of the Brahmans especially. They are reprinted in his Essays, and describe the constant and occasional offices of the Hindus, the rites to be performed daily, and those appropriated to seasons of joy or sorrow, those by which marriage is consecrated and death is solemnized.

Characteristic features in these observances—and they are common to all formal religions—are the prodigal demand which they make upon the time of the observer, and the minuteness of their interference in all the most trivial actions of his life. The Hindu rules compel a Brahman to get out of bed before daylight, and prescribe how many times he shall rince his mouth, and with what sort of a brush and in what attitude he shall clean his teeth. He is then to repair to a river, or piece of water, and bathe. This is not a simple ablution, but a complicated business, in which repeated dippings alternate with a variety of prayers, and a still greater variety of gesticulations. The whole is to precede the rising of the sun, whose appearance is to be waited for and welcomed with other gesticulations and other prayers. The most celebrated of the latter is the Gayatri, held to be the holiest verse in the Vedas, and personified as a goddess, the wife of Brahmá. It is preceded by a mysterious monosyllable, the type of the three divinities, Brahmá, Vishnu, Siva, and the essence of the Vedas—OM, and by three scarcely less sacred words, *Bhur*, *Bhuvar*, *Swar*, denoting earth, atmosphere, heaven. The prayer is merely, "Let us meditate on the sacred light of that divine sun, that it may illuminate our minds."

This is to be repeated mentally as often as the worshipper can do it whilst he closes his mouth and nostrils, effecting the latter by rule. It is the most orthodox of the gesticulations, and is performed by placing the two longest fingers of the right hand on the left nostril, inhaling through the right, closing the right with the thumb, and when the breathing can no longer be suspended raising the fingers and exhaling by the left nostril. There are other gesticulations, all, to our seeming, very absurd, but they are not subjects of ridicule, because they are seriously and reverentially practised by men of even sense and learning. The excuse made for them is that they contribute to fix the attention, and prevent the thoughts from straying. It cannot be regarded as a very arduous attempt to shew how ill calculated must be the subject of an individual's meditations to occupy his mind, how little either his understanding or his feelings can be interested in his devotions, if he is obliged to have recourse to sleight of hand to prevent their being put to flight.

After his morning ablutions, a Brahman ought to devote part of his time to the perusal of the Vedas. This, as already intimated, is never done; but other works—the Puranas—may sometimes be substituted. Then follows domestic worship, now idol worship; for in most houses there is an image of the favourite deity of the householder, in a room or recess appropriated to its accommodation. And to this the family Brahman, in the presence of the master of the house, makes offerings, and addresses prayers, diversifying his recitation by blowing a conch-shell, ringing a bell, beating a drum, waving lights, or other unmeaning accompaniments. A

considerable portion of the forenoon is thus unprofitably expended. There is no doubt that many Hindus of respectability feel these rites as grievous burdens, although the influence of prescription, example, and fear of scandal, prevent them from casting them off.

The marriage ceremonies of the Hindus vary much with caste and condition, but they are always, in relation to the circumstances of the parties, troublesome and expensive. It is very little the object of the rite to impress upon the married couple any reverence for the union so contracted. Some injunctions are directed to the bride; as, "Be gentle in thy aspect; be loyal to thy husband; be amiable in thy mind; be lovely in thy person." But no reciprocity of duty is recommended to the bridegroom. The greater number of the prayers and invocations are mythological and unmeaning. It may be remarked of the rite, however, that it evidently contemplates responsible persons. The Vedas then did not sanction the marriage of children. In fact, it was impossible for a man to marry before maturity, as nine years are specified as the shortest term of his studentship, until the expiration of which he was not allowed to marry. He did not enter his studentship till he was seven or eight, and therefore, at the earliest, he could not have been married before he was seventeen; an early age enough, in our estimation, but absolute manhood, as compared with the age of nine or ten, at which Hindu boys are, according to the present practice, husbands. There is no doubt that many other innovations for the worse have been made in the marriage ritual and usages of the Hindus. And

the whole system, the premature age at which the parties are married, the practice of polygamy, and the circumstances under which the alliance is commonly contracted, involving the utter degradation of the female sex, is equally fatal to the development of the moral virtues and intellectual energies of the man, and is utterly destructive both of public advancement and domestic felicity.

The funeral ceremonies originate also in part from the Vedas. It may be necessary here to explain that the use of forms and prayers, derived from the Vedas, is not incompatible with the neglect of the study of these works. The necessity of an acquaintance with the text has been obviated by the compilation of manuals and breviaries, if they may be so termed, in which the rules are laid down, and the formulæ (whether from the Vedas or other authorities) are inserted. These are always modern. The great authority for Bengal is a Pundit, who lived less than a century ago, named Raghunandana. He composed eighteen works of this kind, denominated Tatwas. One treats of daily rites; one of weekly or monthly rites; one of marriage; one of obsequies, and the like. These are the sources, not always exempt from suspicion of unfaithfulness or interpolation, and always objectionable as confounding authorities, and attaching weight to works of various eras, and of very opposite tendency, by which the practices of the Hindus are regulated.

The Hindus, as is well known, burn their dead; a usage recommended by the peculiarities of climate, and the habits of the people, as much as by authority. The custom of carrying the dying to the banks of the Ganges, or some river considered sacred, has no

warrant from antiquity, any more than it has from reason or humanity. The final commitment of the corpse to the funeral pile is decorously conducted. The tone of the ceremony, though not open to much exception, is cold and selfish. It offers no consolation from the future condition of the dead, although it rebukes the natural emotions of the living: it represses affliction by expatiating upon its inutility; it seeks not to soothe sorrow by inspiring hope.

The practice of the Sati, the burning of the widow on her husband's funeral pile, is now prohibited in the territories subject to the British government. Its prohibition was prudently gradual, and was facilitated by the difference of opinion entertained by the Hindus themselves as to its obligation, as well as by those natural feelings of which not even superstition can wholly divest mankind. Although noticed by the historians of Alexander's invasion, and therefore then prevailing, there is no authority, it is believed, for the practice in the Vedas. There is certainly none even in the laws of Manu.

A peculiar feature in the funeral ceremonies of the Hindus is the performance of the Sraddha: periodical offerings of cakes, of flesh, or other viands, and libations of water, to the manes. These are incumbent on every householder, and are presented on a variety of occasions. They are offered in the first instance to such of his own ancestors as are deceased, and then to the general body of the progenitors of mankind, to the collective Pitris, or Patres of the human race. When a person dies, the nearest of kin presents an obsequial oblation to his ghost daily, for ten days, and again at stated intervals for a twelvemonth. A ceremony is then per-

formed by which the spirit of the defunct is supposed to be associated with the Pitris, and to take his place in their sphere or heaven. On every anniversary of his demise the rite is repeated. These Sraddhas are imperative, but the Pitris should be worshipped once every fortnight at least; and offerings should be made to them on every occasion of private or public festivity, and whenever a householder is desirous of acknowledging or soliciting any temporal good. The character, offices, and situation of the Pitris formed, no doubt, part of the ancient system, and various appellations and functions are ascribed to them in the laws of Manu, and in some of the Puranas. The subject is little considered or understood in the present day. The inefficacy of all such ceremonies has not escaped the satire of some of the Hindus themselves; and it would not be difficult to shew that their object is incompatible with the condition of the soul after death, as it is more commonly represented by their own authorities.

These are some of the practices of the domestic worship of the Hindus, which, although very materially modified, are no doubt referable to their original institutes. The public worship of the Hindus has, unquestionably, undergone still greater change.

The system of the universe and the theory of creation as universally received by the Hindus, no doubt originated with the Vedas, and consequently the three great divinities of their mythology, Brahmá, Vishnu, and Siva, must have been devised about the same time, as they are nothing more than the personified attributes of the Supreme Being in action,

or his powers to create, preserve, and destroy, or, rather, regenerate—manifested. Brahmá is the creator, Vishnu the preserver, Siva the regenerator. Their invention was probably at first little more than a metaphor, a personification, or allegory. It has been mentioned, that little beyond their names appears in the Vedas regarding them, and it is doubtful how far any definite figures, any images of them, any temples for them, any worship of them, formed part of the ancient religion. It is doubtful if Brahmá was ever worshipped. Indications of a local adoration of him at Pushkara, near Ajmir, are found in one Purana, the Brahmá Purana, but in no other part of India is there the slightest vestige of his worship. Of Siva, it is also to be remarked, that he receives worship under one form alone—that of the Linga or Phallus, of which, as before observed, no notice occurs in the Vedas. Some of the continental mythologists, therefore, have been egregiously mistaken in asserting that the primitive worship of India was that of the phallic emblem of Siva. When this type was introduced is uncertain: it was, probably, prior to the Christian era. The worship was in its most flourishing state at the date of the first Mohammedan invasion, the end of the tenth century, when twelve celebrated Lingas were enshrined in as many of the capital cities of India. Somnath was one of them, the destruction of whose temple by Mahmood, of Ghizni, is narrated by Gibbon. The worship of the Linga is now in a somewhat dubious condition in different parts of India. In the south, it gives a name and a principle of combination to a particular sect—the Jangamas or Lingayits, whose chief priests

are Pariahs, outcasts,—although the votaries include Brahmans, and Brahmans are in some of the temples ministering priests under a Pariah pontiff. In Bengal, although the temples are numerous, they are ordinarily mean and are little frequented, and the worship is recommended to the people by no circumstances of popular attraction. It has no hold upon their affections, it is not interwoven with their amusements, nor must it be imagined that it offers any stimulus to impure passions. The emblem—a plain column of stone, or, sometimes, a cone of plastic mud—suggests no offensive ideas; the people call it Siva, or Mahadeva, and there's an end. They leave to Europeans speculations as to its symbolical purport. It is enough for them that it is an image, to which they make a prostration or to which they cast a few flowers. There are no secret rites, no mysterious orgies celebrated in its honour.

Vishnu, the preserving power, is a much more popular divinity, not in his own person, however, but in some of his Avatáras—descents or incarnations, especially as Rama or Krishna. I have already stated that it is very doubtful if these incarnations are adverted to in the Vedas, at least in the text. They are mentioned in some of the Upanishads, supplementary treatises of the Vedas, but these compositions are evidently from their style of later date than the Vedas, and some of them, especially those referring to Rama and Krishna, are of very questionable authenticity.

The history of these two incarnations of Vishnu, Rama and Krishna, gives to the adoration paid to them every appearance of Hero worship. They were both of royal descent, and were both born

on earth like true knights-errant to destroy fiends, giants, and enchanters, and rescue hapless maids and matrons from captivity and violence. Poetry exaggerated their exploits and mythology deified the performers. The story of Rama is told in the mytho-heroic poem, entitled the Ramayana, of the first two books of which a translation in very choice Latin, by the celebrated A. Von Schlegel, has been published. No fault is to be found with the character of Rama as a hero, except the impossibility of his feats; but he is described as a dutiful son, an affectionate husband, an intrepid warrior, and a patriotic prince. His wife, Sita, is a model of a wife,—gentle, devoted, enduring, and obedient. The worst that can be said of either is, that their poetic celebrity has been abused, and has given rise to sects of votaries, who think that the repetition of their names is a sufficient substitute for all moral and religious merit. Most of the mendicant orders choose Rama for their patron.

The worship of Krishna may be traced to the other of the two great mytho-heroic poems of the Hindus, the Mahabharata. In the accounts there given of him there is more of mysticism than in the story of Rama; but even there he does not appear under the character in which he is most popular, that of the infant Gopala, the boy Cowherd, and the juvenile lover of Radhá. It is in these capacities that he is now most extensively worshipped; and they are no doubt fictions of comparatively modern invention. Vishnu was born as Krishna for the destruction of Kansa, an oppressive monarch, and, in fact, an incarnate Daitya or Titan, the natural enemy of the gods. Kansa being forewarned

of his fate seeks to anticipate his destroyer; but Krishna is conveyed secretly away from Mathura, the capital of Kansa, and is brought up as the child of a cowherd at Vrindavan, a pastoral district near Mathura. It is whilst thus circumstanced that he has been exalted into an object of adoration, and the mischievous follies of the child, the boy, and the lad, are the subject of popular delight and wonder. His male companions are not very prominent in the tale of his youth; but the females, the deified dairy-maids, play a more important part in the drama. Amongst the most conspicuous is the one I have named, Radha; and she receives scarcely less universal homage than Krishna himself. The adoration of the forms of Siva or Vishnu is advocated not upon the original principle, that worship addressed to them is virtually addressed to the Supreme, they being merely representations of his power, but upon the novel doctrine, that one or other of them is himself the Supreme; and not only this, but in the true spirit of pantheism that he is all things. This is asserted of Siva by the Saivas; of Vishnu, by the Vaishnavas. This notion, which is very widely disseminated, seems to have originated with the next great class of the sacred writings of the Hindus, the Puránas.

The Puránas are eighteen in number: some of them are voluminous compositions. It is said that they were the work of the same Vyasa by whom the Vedas were arranged, and they are held in almost equal estimation. According to a definition furnished by many of them, a Purana should treat of five topics—primary creation, secondary creation, the families of the patriarchs, the reigns of the

Mánus, and the dynasties of kings. The actual Puránas conform in no one instance to this definition: the authors are often declared to be others than Vyasa, and they offer many internal proofs that they are the work of various hands, and of different dates, none of which are of very high antiquity. I believe the oldest of them not to be anterior to the eighth or ninth century; and the most recent to be not above three or four centuries old. In the present state of Hindu belief the Puránas exercise a very general influence. Some of them, or portions of them, are publicly read and expounded by Brahmans to all classes of people. Most Brahmans who pretend to scholarship are acquainted with two or more of them, and particular sections, as the Devi Mahátmya are amongst the most popular works in the Sanscrit language. Prayers from them have been copiously introduced into all the breviaries; observances of feasts and fasts are regulated by them; temples, and towns, and mountains, and rivers, to which pilgrimages are made, owe their sanctity to legends for which the Puránas or the Mahatmyas, works asserted, often untruly, to be sections of them, are the only authorities; and texts quoted from them have validity in civil as well as religious law. The determination of their modern and unauthenticated composition deprives them of the sacred character which they have usurped, destroys their credit, impairs their influence, and strikes away the main prop, on which, at present, the great mass of Hindu idolatry and superstition relies. That the Puranas represent in many instances an older, and probably a primitive scheme of Hinduism, is no doubt true; they have

preserved many ancient legends; they have handed down all that the Hindus have of traditional history, and they furnish authoritative views of the essential institutions of the Hindus, both in their social and religious organisation. But in their decidedly sectarial character; in their uncompromising advocacy of the pre-eminence of some one deity, or of some one of his manifestations, in the boldness with which they assert his pantheistic presence, in the importance they attach to particular observances, as fasting on the 8th, 11th, and 14th days of each half month, in the holiness with which they invest particular localities, in the tone and spirit of their prayers and hymns, and in the numerous, and almost always frivolous, and insipid, and immoral legends, which they have grafted upon the more fanciful, dignified, and significant inventions of antiquity; they betray most glaringly the purposes for which they were composed, the dissemination of new articles of faith, the currency of new gods. The Hindus are not much disposed to scrutinise with critical suspicion the history of a composition reputed sacred; yet even they have been unable to avoid a controversy amongst themselves respecting the authenticity of the most popular of all the Puranas, the Bhagavata; and many learned Brahmans maintain that it is the work of an uninspired writer, a celebrated grammarian, named Vopadeva, who flourished in the twelfth century. This is strenuously denied by those with whom it is the text-book for their worship of the infant Krishna; but there is no doubt of the fact. There is equally little doubt that another of these works, the Brahma Vaivarta Purana, is still more modern. It is dedi-

cated in great part to the juvenile Krishna, and his favourite mistress, Radha; and although the worship of Radha is now so exceedingly popular, particularly in western Hindustan, yet her person, and even her name, are unknown to all the other Puranas, to the heroic poems, and even to the popular literature of the Hindus, to the plays, poems, and tales which are not compositions of the last three or four centuries.

It would occupy too much time to enter into any further details upon this subject. The grounds upon which the opinions intimated have been formed may be found in analytical descriptions of the contents of several of the most popular of the Puranas which have been published in the Journals of the Asiatic Societies of Bengal and Great Britain, and in the preface to the Vishnu Purána to which I have previously referred [a].

There seems good reason to believe that the Puránas in their present form accompanied or succeeded a period of considerable religious ferment in India, and were designed to uphold and extend the doctrines of rival sects, which then disputed the exclusive direction of the faith of the Hindus. It began perhaps in the third or fourth century of our æra, having for its object the extermination of the Buddhists, who in consequence were driven out of India to Siam, Java, China and Tibet. When the Buddhists, whom all parties considered

[a] Analysis of the Agni Purana: Jour. As. Soc. of Bengal, vol. I. p. 81; of the Brahma Vaivartta P. ib. p. 217; of the Vishnu P. ib. p. 431; of the Vayu P. 535; of the Brahma P. Jour. Royal As. Soc. of Great Britain, vol. V. p. 61; of the Padma P. ib. p. 280.

heterodox were expelled, their enemies began to quarrel amongst themselves, and in the eighth or ninth century a reformer named Sankara Acharya is celebrated for having refuted and suppressed a variety of unorthodox professors, and established the preferential worship of Siva. He instituted in support of his doctrines an order of mendicants which still subsists, and he is in an especial manner regarded as the founder of a system of belief adhered to by Brahmans of learning, particularly in the south of India. The triumph that he obtained for the deity he patronized did not long survive him. Early in the eleventh century, Ramanuja a follower of Vishnu, undertook to depose Siva and set up his own divinity, not only in the belief of the people, but in the more substantial benefits of temples and endowments. Tradition records, that the great temple of Triveni, one of the largest and richest in the Peninsula, now dedicated to Vishnu, was wrested from the rival votaries of Siva by Ramanuja and his followers. The ascendency of the Vaishnavas was not undisputed in the south, and a new sect of Saivas, to whom I have alluded, the Lingayits, sprang up in opposition to them: the contest was carried on with popular violence, and in one of the disturbances that ensued, the Raja of Kalyan-pur was killed and his capital destroyed. The Mohammedan invasion of the south crushed both the contending parties, and the predominance of the same power in Upper India prevented the like violence of collision. The Vaishnavas there spread with little resistance under the followers of Ramanand, a disciple of Ramanuja, to whom, or to whose pupils, the greater proportion of the mendicant orders in Hindustan owe their

origin, and under two Brahmanical families, one in the west sprung from a teacher named Vallabha, who established themselves as hereditary priests of the juvenile Krishna, and one in Bengal and Orissa descended from Nityanand and Adwaitanand, two disciples of Chaitanya, a teacher, with whom the popularity of the worship of Jagannath originated. A particular description of all the different divisions of the popular religion of the Hindus may be found in the sixteenth and seventeenth volumes of the Asiatic Researches[b].

These different orders and families are now almost exclusively the spiritual directors of the people. Some of them are rich and of Brahmanical descent; some are poor and composed of persons of all castes. They are almost all, whether rich or poor, illiterate and profligate. Such literature as they occasionally cultivate—and it is one of the means by which they act upon the people—is vernacular literature, compositions in the spoken languages. These are mostly songs and hymns addressed to Vishnu, Krishna or Radha, tales and legends of individuals celebrated amongst them as saints, always marvellous, mostly absurd, and not unfrequently immoral, and vague and dogmatical expositions of elements of belief, which although in some degree discoverable in the Puranas, have assumed a novel and portentous prominence in the doctrines of the Vaishnava teachers and the practices of the people. These elements are passionate devotion and all-sufficient faith.

Whatever may have been the mistaken veneration entertained by the early Hindus for personified ele-

[b] Sketch of the Religious Sects of the Hindus, As. Res. vol. XVI. p. 1. and XVII. p. 169.

ments and attributes, or even for deified mortals, the language of invocation and prayer, though reverential, is calm and unimpassioned. The hymns of modern fanatics are composed in a very different strain, and breathe a glowing fervour of devotion which might almost be mistaken for sensual love. Something of this may have been borrowed from the Mohammedans, amongst whom the Sufis have always employed the language of earthly rapture, to describe the yearnings of the human soul, to be reunited with that divine spirit from which it is supposed to have originally proceeded. "Oh! the bliss of that day," says a Persian mystic, "when I shall depart from this desolate mansion, shall seek rest for my soul, and shall follow the traces of my beloved." They possibly derived their notions from one branch of the Hindu philosophy, the Vedanta; but they pursued the figure until they had converted it into a gross deformity, and furnished a model adapted to the ardent imagination of irrational enthusiasm. A remarkable specimen of this style has been given to English readers by sir William Jones, in his translation of the songs of Jayadeva; where, although to the uninitiated, the hero and heroine appear to be actuated by human passions alone, yet the initiated find in the fervent desires and jealous tortures of Radha, the anxieties, the hopes, the fears, the longings of the soul; and in the steady, though sometimes seemingly inconstant love of Krishna, the affection which the Supreme Being bears amidst all his misgivings and fallings off to man. As a brief and inoffensive specimen of this kind of composition, I will quote a few stanzas attributed to a lady named Míra Bai, princess of

Jaypur, and one of the Sadhwis, or female saints of the Vaishnavas, addressed to Krishna as Rana-chhor, a curious title to have been given him, as it means the coward, the runaway from battle.

"O sovereign Rana-chhor, give me to make Dwaraka my perpetual abode. Dispel with thy shell, discus, and mace, the fear of Yama (the deity of death). Eternal rest is pilgrimage to thy sacred shrines. Supreme delight is the sound of thy shell, the clash of thy cymbals. I have abandoned my love, my possessions, my principality, my husband. Mîrá thy servant comes to thee for refuge—O take her wholly to thee. Lord of Mírá, Girdhara her beloved, accept her, and never let her more be separate from thee." Upon which, says the legend, the image opened—Mírá leaped into the fissure—it closed—and the princess disappeared for ever.

The other principle which I have specified, and which is closely allied with the preceding, is the absolute sufficiency of faith alone, wholly independent of conduct, to insure salvation. This doctrine is carried to the very utmost of that abuse of which it is susceptible. Entire dependence upon Krishna, or any other favourite deity, not only obviates the necessity of virtue, but it sanctifies vice. Conduct is wholly immaterial. It matters not how atrocious a sinner a man may be, if he paints his face, his breast, his arms, with certain sectarial marks; or, which is better, if he brands his skin permanently with them with a hot iron stamp; if he is constantly chaunting hymns in honour of Vishnu; or, what is equally efficacious, if he spends hours in the simple reiteration of his name or names; if he die with the word Hari or Rama or Krishna on his lips,

and the thought of him in his mind, he may have lived a monster of iniquity—he is certain of heaven.

Now these doctrines and practices, however popular with the multitude, and although traceable to authorities held in high estimation, are not looked upon, it may be easily imagined, by Brahmans of learning, with any profound deference. Their tendency is in a great degree to supersede all ritual, whether of the Vedas or Puranas, and to divest the authorized expounders of those works of all influence and control over the acts and thoughts of the people. They will therefore not be indisposed to acknowledge that the objects of this fervour of devotion are wholly unworthy of it, and that its inculcation is calculated to destroy all moral and religious principle.

Whilst most of the existing sects have thus outraged even Hinduism, it is consolatory to find that a few have taken a different direction; and although they have stopped short of the truth, they have displayed a disposition to seek it which may turn to good account. There are several sects that have abandoned all worship of idols, that deny the efficacy of faith in any of the popular divinities, and question the reasonableness of many of the existing institutions: they substitute a moral for a ceremonial code, and address their prayers to one only God. These sects are not numerous, but they are in general respectable. Such however is the want which is felt by the Indian mind of something tangible on which to lean, that they have mostly lapsed into something very like an idolatrous worship of their founder. Still they prove that the people are not all satisfied with the superstitions of their fore-

fathers, and that some among them are inclined to inquire, and think, and determine for themselves. That they offer a favourable soil in which to implant the seeds of Christianity has been lately shewn by the conversion of the inhabitants of several villages in the vicinity of Krishnagur, who had for some time past seceded from the prevailing practices, and under teachers of their own had adopted a theistical belief.

There is still another and a very important division of the Hindu religion to be noticed, so far is it from being a consistent and homogeneous system. The history of this is very obscure, and the origin of the authorities on which it rests is unknown. Tradition is silent as to the authors of the Tantras—they are mythologically ascribed to Siva, and are generally in the form of a colloquy between him and his wife Parvati. They are very numerous, and some are of considerable volume; but they are not included in any of the ordinary enumerations of Hindu literature, and were, no doubt, composed after that literature was complete in all its parts. They are specified in some of the Puranas, to which they must be therefore anterior. They have been but little examined by European scholars, but sufficient has been ascertained to warant the accusation that they are authorities for all that is most abominable in the present state of the Hindu religion.

The great feature of the religion taught by the Tantras is the worship of Sakti—Divine power personified as a female, and individualized, not only in the goddesses of mythology, but in every woman; to whom, therefore, in her own person religious worship may be and is occasionally addressed. The

chief objects of adoration, however, are the manifold forms of the bride of Siva; Parvati, Uma, Durga, Kali, Syama, Vindhya-vasini, Jagannata, and others. Besides the usual practices of offerings, oblations, hymns, invocations, the ritual comprises many mystical ceremonies and accompaniments, gesticulations and diagrams, and the use in the commencement and close of the prayers of various monosyllabic ejaculations of imagined mysterious import. Even in its least exceptionable division it comprehends the performance of magical ceremonies and rites, intended to obtain superhuman powers, and a command over the spirits of heaven, earth, and hell. The popular division is, however, called by the Hindus themselves the *left-hand* Sakta-faith. It is to this that the bloody sacrifices offered to Kali must be imputed; and that all the barbarities and indecencies perpetrated at the Durga Puja, the annual worship of Durga, and the Churuk Puja, the swinging festival, are to be ascribed. There are other atrocities which do not meet the public eye. This is not an unfounded accusation, not a controversial calumny. We have the books—we can read the texts—some of them are in print, veiled necessarily in the obscurity of the original language, but incontrovertible witnesses of the veracity of the charge. Of course no respectable Hindu will admit that he is a Vamachari, a follower of the left-hand ritual, or that he is a member of a society in which meat is eaten, wine is drunk, and abominations not to be named are practised. The imputation will be indignantly denied, although, if the Tantras be believed, "many a man who calls himself a Saiva, or a Vaishnava, is secretly a Sakta, and a brother of the

left-hand fraternity." But what can any Hindu of reason and right feeling say in vindication of a system which has suffered such enormities to be grafted upon it, which could afford any plea, any suggestion, any opening for abuses of which he admits, when he dares not avow them in his own case, the shame and the sin?

For further information on this subject, I must once more refer you to the 16th and 17th volumes of the Asiatic Researches.

From the survey which has thus been submitted to you, you will perceive that the practical religion of the Hindus is by no means a concentrated and compact system, but a heterogeneous compound, made up of various and not unfrequently incompatible ingredients, and that to a few ancient fragments it has made large and unauthorized additions, most of which are of an exceedingly mischievous and disgraceful nature. It is, however, of little avail yet to attempt to undeceive the multitude; their superstition is based upon ignorance, and until the foundation is taken away, the superstructure, however crazy and rotten, will hold together. By what means this object may be best accomplished, admits of difference of opinion; but there can be no disagreement as to the general conclusion, that all means which hold out promise of success, which are honest, rational, and benevolent, should be tried, as far as may be consistent with the most scrupulous regard for the obligations of our political position in India, upon the permanence and integrity of which depends every hope of ultimate success.

The means suggested by the plan submitted to

the University, are in every respect unexceptionable: you are invited to employ knowledge and argument, in endeavouring to convince intelligent and learned Hindus of the defects and errors of their religion. This is probably not difficult of accomplishment to a certain extent; many, perhaps most educated Hindus, contemplate with indifference or contempt, the practices and belief of the majority of their countrymen. There are, however, obstacles of some magnitude to be overcome, before conviction can be hoped for.

The whole tendency of Brahmanical education is to enforce dependence upon authority. In the first instance upon the Guru, in the next upon the books. A learned Brahman trusts solely to his learning; he never ventures upon independent thought; he appeals to memory; he quotes texts without measure, and in unquestioning trust. It will be difficult to persuade him that the Vedas are human and very ordinary writings, that the Puranas are modern and unauthentic, or even that the Tantras are not entitled to respect. As long as he opposes authority to reason, and stifles the workings of conviction by the dicta of a reputed sage, little impression can be made upon his understanding. Certain it is, that he will have recourse to his authorities, and it is therefore important to shew that his authorities are worthless.

Another serious obstacle is opposed, by his temporal interests. Although the learned Brahman does not participate in the profits of religious offices, yet he derives no small share of emolument and consideration from his connexion with religion, as the interpreter of the works in which it is taught. A

Pundit, a learned Brahman, although he takes no part in the ceremonial of religious festivals, or marriage feasts, or funeral solemnities, is always invited as a guest, and presents are made to him, of value proportionate to his reputation. They constitute, indeed, his chief, often his sole means of subsistence, as well as of that of his scholars, whom he is obliged by the law to teach, without gratuity or fee, and whom it is his duty also in part to support. The predominance of a foreign government, and one which, notwithstanding the plausibility of its professions, sympathises not at all with any class of its native subjects, excludes a learned Hindu from any hope of the patronage of the state, and we need not wonder, therefore, if he should be reluctant to acknowledge the truth, by which he may starve, and should cling to the error, by which alone he lives.

There is still another and a weighty obstacle to conviction, which arises from the state of the native mind, especially amongst men of learning. Their toleration is so comprehensive, that it amounts to indifference to truth. The Brahmans who compiled a code of Hindu law, by command of Warren Hastings, preface their performance, by affirming the equal merit of every form of religious worship. Contrarieties of belief, and diversities of religion, they say, are in fact part of the scheme of Providence, for as a painter gives beauty to a picture by a variety of colours, or as a gardener embellishes his garden with flowers of every hue, so God appointed to every tribe its own faith, and every sect its own religion, that man might glorify him in diverse modes, all having the same end, and being equally

acceptable in his sight. To the same effect it is stated by Dr. Mill in the preface to the Krista Sangita, or sacred history of Christ, in Sanscrit verse, that he had witnessed the eager reception of the work, by devotees from every part of India, even in the temple of Kali, near Calcutta, and that it was read and chaunted by them, with a full knowledge of its anti-idolatrous tendency, close to the very shrine of the impure goddess. "No one acquainted with India," he adds, "will rate these facts at more than their real worth, and to those who, in ignorance of the genius of paganism, might found erroneous conceptions on them, it may be sufficient to recall to mind, what is the most melancholy trait in the history of this work, the readiness with which these devotees of superstition can assume the ideas of a faith most opposed to it." This indifference is undoubtedly the most formidable impediment with which argument has to contend, but it is not in the nature of things, it is not, we may presume to believe, in the dispensations of Providence, that truth should not ultimately prevail. Its effects may not be confessed, though felt; its influence may not be manifested, though implanted. The seed lies long beneath the soil, but it germinates, though in darkness: and it rises at last into daylight, and ripens into the nutritious grain, blossoms in the beautiful flower, and expands into the vast and majestic monarch of the forest.

In my next lecture I propose to take a view of the opinions of the Hindus on the existence and character of God—the creation of the universe—the nature of the soul—and the destiny of man.

LECTURE II.

WE yesterday considered the state of the Hindus in regard to those practices of a religious character which are prevalent in India. The domestic worship which originated with the Vedas, and of which portions are still retained in the daily and occasional observances of individuals in their purifications, their marriage, and their funeral ceremonies, and the public worship of the Divine attributes of creation, preservation, and regeneration, referable to the same works, first engaged our attention. We then adverted to the introduction of Hero worship by the mytho-Heroic poems, its dissemination under new modifications by the Puranas, and its still further alteration and adaptation to the taste of the people by persons and orders of modern date, who had introduced new divinities and new elements of belief in the passionate devotion and all-sufficient faith of which Krishna was in particular the object, and we lastly noticed the mystical and debasing rites which, founded upon the class of works called Tantras, were exercising at present a most baneful influence upon the manners and principles of the Hindus. These circumstances, although comprehending even the better informed and more learned amongst the natives of India, apply still more particularly to the religious practices of the people at large. We have now to treat of topics which

concern the educated and learned more especially—to the opinions which they have been taught, by men whom they consider as little lower than divinities, to entertain on some of the most important subjects of reflexion, which in all ages have exercised and tested the energies of the human mind.

The speculative notions of the Hindus originate, in a great degree, with the same authorities that have enjoined their religious practices. Although in their widest scope familiar only to the learned, and to some only amongst them, yet the subjects of speculation, and the modes in which they are investigated, are not wholly unknown to the literature of the people. The Indian mind, even amongst the least instructed, has a ready tendency to contemplative reflexion, and delights in subtle and metaphysical research. We need not be surprised, therefore, to find the great mysteries of the universe, some attention to which is forced upon the least civilized portions of the human race, favourite objects of inquiry amongst the Hindus from the earliest periods of their traditional history, or that they should from the first have expatiated freely in conjecture and hypothesis, how the universe came to be and whence, what is the nature of man, what his origin, and what his destination. What were at first conjectures only were soon transmuted into dogmas. These were next moulded into systems, and a variety of works have in all ages been composed by Hindu writers, in which it is attempted, with considerable profundity of thought and subtlety of reasoning, and with still more unhesitating positiveness, to solve all the most dark and difficult perplexities of our condition, but leaving them, as all the efforts

of human wisdom unassisted by revelation have ever left them, still in darkness and perplexity.

The Hindus boast of six different schools or systems of metaphysical philosophy. They are called the Púrva Mimánsá, Uttara Mimánsá, or Vedanta, the Sankhya, the Patanjala, the Nyayika, and the Vaisheshika: these, although some of them offer irreconcilable contradictions to essential doctrines of their religious belief, are recognised by the Brahmans as orthodox, and attributed to authors of saintly reputation. There are other schools, as those of the Charvakas, Buddhists, and Jains, which, although in some respects not more at variance with received opinions than the preceding, are stigmatized with the reproach of infidelity and atheism. The cause of this difference is sufficiently obvious, and is characteristic of a state of feeling which prevails as much in the present as in any former period. The orthodox schools of philosophy do not disparage the authority of the Vedas, they do not dissuade the celebration of the acts of formal devotion which the Vedas or Puranas enjoin, although they argue their utter inefficacy as means of final and permanent felicity. They recommend their performance, however, as conducive to that frame of mind in which abstract contemplation may be safely substituted for devotional rites, and even admit of external observances after the mind is in pursuit of true knowledge, as long as such ceremonies are practised from no interested motive, as long as they are observed because they are enjoined, and not because any benefit is either to be expected or desired from their practice. Again, the writings of the orthodox philosophers meddle not with exist-

ing institutions; and least of all do they urge or insinuate any consideration to detract from the veneration, or trespass upon the privileges, of the Brahmans. As long as these precautions were observed, the Brahmans did not, nor would they now object to any form of doctrine having in view the establishment of merely abstract propositions. The case was very different with the heterodox schools. They went from abstractions to things. The Charvakas condemned all ceremonial rites, ridiculed even the Sraddha, and called the authors of the Vedas, fools, knaves, and buffoons. The Buddhists and Jains denied the inspiration of the Vedas and the sanctity of the Brahmanical character, abrogated the distinction of caste, invented a set of deities for themselves, whom they placed above those of the Hindu pantheon, and organized a regular hierarchy, a priesthood, and a pontiff; an institution still subsisting in the trans-Indian countries, of which the grand Lama of Tibet is the head. It is a remarkable historical fact, that this organization was found too feeble to oppose, in India, the apparently loose and incoherent, the undisciplined, the anarchical authority of the Brahmans. It had, however, the effect of exciting their apprehensions and their hatred to such an extent, that it became proverbial with them to say, "If your only alternative be to encounter a heretic or a tiger, throw yourself before the latter; better be devoured by the animal than contaminated by the man." There may be a few Charvakas in India, but their opinions are unavowed. The Buddhists have totally disappeared. The Jains are found in some numbers and influence in the west of India, but are little heard of elsewhere.

Besides the acknowledged schools or systems of philosophy, there is another, which, without being considered as one of the number, and without claiming the character of a system, is, nevertheless, to be included in the list, as it presents a peculiar scheme of doctrine on metaphysical subjects, and exercises more influence over popular opinion than any of the rest; this is the Pauranik school, the philosophy of the Puranas: it may be termed also the Eclectic school, as it has evidently derived its principles from different systems, and formed them into a miscellaneous combination of its own contrivance. It is not put forward as a new scheme, but is subsidiary to the popularization of particular objects of worship, for which the Puranas, as we remarked yesterday, seem to have been composed.

The Vedas are authority for the existence of one Divine Being, supreme over the universe, and existing before all worlds. "In the beginning," it is said, "this all (this universe) was in darkness." "He (the Supreme) was alone, without a second." "He reflected, I am one, I will become many." Will was conceived in the Divine mind, and creation ensued. This being the doctrine of the Vedas is that also of the Vedanta, the purport of which school is declared to be the same as that of the Vedas—their end (anta) or aim. I mentioned before that the Vedas comprise two portions, one practical, one speculative. The speculative or theological portion of the Vedas is explained chiefly in separate treatises, called Upanishads. These are for the most part short, and are commonly mystical and obscure. The ordinary enumeration of them is fifty-one. There are some others, but they are

probably spurious. The whole fifty-one were translated into Latin, and published by Anquetil du Perron in 1801, under the title of "Oupnekhat, seu, Theologia et Philosophia Indica[e]." His translation was made from a Persian version, translated by order of a Mohammedan prince, the elder brother and unsuccessful competitor of Aurungzeb, Dara Shekoh. Persian translators are not very careful, nor is the Latinity of Anquetil du Perron remarkable for precision. His version, therefore, is almost as unintelligible as the original Sanscrit. Some of the Upanishads have been rendered into very good English by Rammohun Roy[f]; and the whole are in course of translation into French, by a Prussian gentleman, M. Poley. There will be no difficulty, therefore, in acquiring whatever information the Upanishads may afford regarding the Monotheism and the Psychology of the Vedas.

The Vedánta is called also the Uttara-mimánsá—subsequent or supplementary investigation. I have named also a Purva-mimánsá, or prior-school of investigation; the object of this is to teach the art of reasoning, with the express purpose of aiding the interpretation of the Vedas not only in the speculative but the practical portion. As far as concerns the former, it of course adopts the same monotheistic principles. The Pátanjala school teaches also the being of a God; the Nyáyika and Vaishekika teach the existence of one Supreme Soul—the seat of knowledge and the maker of all things; and

[e] Oupnekhat &c. 2 vol. 4to. Parisiis (ix.) 1801.]

[f] Translation of several principal books, passages, and texts of the Vedas, by Raja Rammohun Roy. 8vo. London, Allen and Co. 1832.

the weakness of man; he is immortal only in relation to the shortness of human life. The Gods had a beginning, they will have an end; their duration ceases at the period of universal dissolution. The Puranas, however, as I have intimated, have it especially in view to elevate to exclusive adoration some individual of the greater mythological divinities; and they can claim this exaltation for their favourite only by identifying him with that Being of whose supremacy and eternity there is no dispute. Their God, their Vishnu or Siva, is then no longer a limited and finite Being; he is no longer a God—he is God. The incongruity of attributes and no attributes; of perfect happiness with feelings of affection or animosity; of perfect purity with the human frailties and vices that reduce the Pauranik deities to weak and profligate men; of almighty power and wisdom, with the feebleness and fear and folly ascribed to them on various occasions, is too palpable to be denied. The objection is therefore evaded. It is asserted that the Supreme assumes these disguises for his sport or for the manifestation of his power, or that the whole is an illusion a mystery—which the grossness of human conception is unable to penetrate or comprehend. The philosophical writings are, however, free from these contradictions, and they clearly owe their origin to that spirit of sectarian rivalry of which the Puranas are the champions, and were, perhaps, the source. They are foreign also to the tenor of the doctrine of the Vedas; for although texts are frequent which affirm that Brahma is all that exists, and consequently is Brahmá, Vishnu and Siva, as well as all other persons and things, yet none can

be cited affirmative of the converse of the proposition, or sanctioning the doctrine that any one of the inferior divinities is Brahma.

The doctrine of Pantheism—the identification of God and the universe—is another principle which the Puranas most unequivocally and resolutely maintain. Vishnu, Siva, or Sakti, whatever individual they undertake to glorify, is not only the remote and efficient, but the proximate and substantial cause of the world. Thus, in the Linga Purana, Brahmá addresses Siva, "Glory to thee, whose form is the universe." In the Vishnu Purana, "This world was produced from Vishnu; it exists in him; he is the cause of its continuance and cessation; he is the world." In the Kalika Purana, the goddess Kali is said to be identical with the universe, as well as distinct from it; and in the Brahma Vaivartta, even Radha is eulogized as "the mother of the world, and the world itself; as one with primæval nature—with universal nature, and with all created forms; with all cause, and with all effect." Expressions of this tenor occur in every page of the Puranas; and although something may be ascribed to the exaggerations of panegyric, and the obscurities of mysticism, yet the declarations are too positive and reiterated to admit of reasonable doubt. And it cannot be questioned that these writers confound the creature with the Creator, and expose themselves justly to the imputation of gross materialism.

Little doubt can be entertained that the materialism of the Puranas derives some countenance from the Vedas. Universality is there predicated of the Supreme Being directly, without the intervention of any one of his hypostases. Thus it is said,

"This whole is Brahma, from Brahmá to a clod of earth. Brahma is both the efficient and the material cause of the world. He is the potter by whom the fictile vase is formed; he is the clay of which it is fabricated. Every thing proceeds from him, without waste or diminution of the source, as light radiates from the sun. Every thing merges into him again, as bubbles bursting mingle with the air, as rivers fall into the ocean, and lose their identity in its waters. Every thing proceeds from and returns to him, as the web of the spider is emitted from, and retracted into itself." These and similar illustrations speak the language of materialism too plainly to be misunderstood, although it may be possible that the full extent of their signification was not intended; that these comparisons are not to be interpreted too literally; that they purpose no more than to assert the origin of all things from the same first Cause; that the authors of the texts may have been in the same predicament as the author of the "Essay on Man," and inculcated materialism without being aware of it.

The distinction however did not escape the notice of the philosophers; and the schools, which are probably the most ancient, carefully discriminate between spirit and matter, as the two opposite elements by whose temporary association the world is compounded. This is particularly the case with the Sankhya, the doctrines of which school may be seen in the translation of one of its text-books (the Sankhya Karika), printed in Oxford.[g] Matter is by the Sankhyas subtilized, in its undeveloped

[g] Sankhya Karika, translated from the Sanscrit, &c. 1 vol. 4to. 1837. Allen and Co.

state, into a principle, the precise character of which is not very intelligible, but to which the vague denomination of "Nature" may be applied. They do not however question the reality of substance: the various forms of substance, gross material forms, they trace back through others more subtile, which proceed from one imperceptible, indefinable Prakriti or nature. They maintain that causes and effects are essentially the same, and there is no real difference between a product and that which produces it. Consequently, as all substances are products of nature, nature itself is substantial; that is, it is matter. Matter and spirit, then, are the two elements of the universe; both unproduced; the former productive, the latter not; both eternal and independent; subject to change of form and condition, but incapable of destruction; combining, from the influence of a controlling necessity, for a given object and a definite term, but perpetually reverting to a primitive, inert, and reciprocal independence.

It might be supposed that the Vedanta philosophy, professing to carry out the doctrine of the Vedas, would have been next in order of time to those works; but this is questionable: and it seems not improbable that the system originated in the purpose of exonerating the Vedas from the charge of materialism, by founding upon such texts as have already been quoted the refinement of spiritual Pantheism, or idealism, and at the same time controverting the doctrine of the Sankhyas and the Nyayikas, which maintained the distinct and independent existence of matter and spirit. The doctrine of the Vedanta is denominated κατ' εξοχην, Adwaita, nonduality; and the very title indicates the priority of a dualistic hypothesis. The main proposition

contended for, in opposition to that which affirms two elements of creation, matter and spirit, being the existence of one only element in the universe, which universal element or principle is spirit.

But then comes the question, the solution of which has puzzled the philosophers, not of India only, but of the world; not only of ancient but modern times; not only Vyasa and Sankara, but Parmenides and Plato; Mallebranche and Berkeley; Fichte and Schelling. If all is spirit, what is substance? The early teachers of the Vedanta school asserted it was the Sakti, the perceptible power, the active energy, the manifested instrumentality of the Supreme Spirit; and therefore, though not substantially, yet essentially one and the same. As this solution was possibly found too subtle to satisfy the understanding, later teachers went a step farther, and boldly cut the knot, by maintaining there is no such thing as substance. In the spirit of the Berkeleyan theory, they affirmed that matter exists not independent of perception, and that substances are indebted for their seeming reality to the ideas of the mind. They went still farther, and maintained that until our intellects are purified by abstraction, until we have attained a just appreciation of our own nature, and of that of universal spirit, our ideas are all wrong. Until the day of true knowledge dawn upon us, we are asleep—in a dream; we misconceive of all we perceive; we take a rope for a snake; an oyster-shell for mother-of-pearl; mirage for real water. All that we see in our unilluminated condition is Máyá, deception, illusion. There are no two things in existence; there is but one in all. There is no second, no

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matter; there is spirit alone. The world is not God, but there is nothing but God in the world.

Should it be an object to acquire more precise views of this part of our subject, they are easily attainable. The doctrines of the Vedanta philosophy have been recently the topic of controversy, as similar doctrines of idealism or transcendentalism have ever been and will probably ever be. The different schools of Indian philosophy are described by Mr. Colebrooke in several essays, in the Transactions of the Royal Asiatic Society. In speaking of the Vedanta, he indicates the tendency of the illustrations which its teachers borrow from the Vedas towards materialism, and asserts the explanation of Maya or illusion, to have been an after-thought. Col. Vans Kennedy, also a distinguished Oriental scholar, had maintained in a work which merits to be consulted on a variety of important points—Researches on the Nature and Affinities of ancient and Hindu Mythology[h]—that the Hindu philosophers of every school and every period had asserted a spiritual principle alone, and never countenanced materialism. He therefore in defence of his theory controverted Mr. Colebrooke's account of the Vedanta in an essay on the subject, published in the third volume of the Society's Transactions. Sir Graves Haughton appended to this paper some observations in vindication of Mr. Colebrooke's views, which called forth further comments from Col. Vans Kennedy, a reply from sir Graves Haughton, and a rejoinder from the colonel. These latter papers were printed in the London Asiatic Journal; whether they have settled the point in dispute may be doubted,

[h] Published by Longman and Co. 1 vol. 4to. 1831.

but they have had the effect of bringing the principal doctrines of the Vedanta philosophy within the acquirement of European students.[1]

The observations thus made have anticipated in some degree an explanation of the opinions entertained by the Hindus in regard to the creation. The theories that attempt to elucidate its course are more definite and congruous than those which would ascertain its cause. All the schools admit two sorts, or rather stages of creation, one rudimental and primary, the other formal and secondary. They all admit the infinity and eternal succession of creations, their periodical dissolution or disintegration, and their periodical regeneration or reorganization. In the season that precedes creation, all agree that there is no perceptible form—all is without shape. According to the Vedanta philosophy there is no substratum even of form, there is no immaterial substance; the illusion is dissipated, the energy has ceased to act separately; all real, that is, all spiritual existence is concentrated in its supreme source, which is still all that is. All the other schools, theistical or atheistical, are dualistic, and agree in recognising the eternity and indestructibility of the principle or element of the sensible world, the major part of the Indian sages adopting as an axiom the prevailing doctrine of classical antiquity, *ex nihilo nihil*. Whether creation therefore took place from the will of a Creator, or the spontaneous evolution of its principles, it is preceded by a something; by nature, say the Sankhyas, by simple uncompounded imperishable atoms, say the Nyayiks. When the evolution of the first imperceptible material prin-

[1] Asiatic Journal, October, 1835; November, 1835; January, 1839. London. Allen and Co.

ciple into perceptible form takes place without the intervention of the Divine will, it proceeds from necessity. Nature is compelled to assume corporeal form that the ends of Spirit may be fulfilled, namely, that it may be embodied, until by a series of bodily migrations it has no longer need of such a state, it has attained knowledge which is the cause of its liberation, and its connection with matter ceases. "Soul desists," says the Sankhya Karika, "because he has seen (or fully understood) nature. Nature ceases (or withdraws) because she has been seen;" that is, fully understood. It is not very intelligible why the soul, which in its independent state is described as already pure, should be allied with body merely to be purified, and so freed from the alliance. But this is a difficulty for the followers of the Sankhya to explain.

The mode in which the Divine will operates as it is alluded to in the Vedas, is not attempted to be explained. He wills creation to be, and it is. In the systems in which primæval crude matter is the subject of Divine agency, its development is ascribed to an influence communicated to it by the Divine will, by which it receives motion and life. This appears to have been expressed in language originally metaphorical, but some of the Puranas have understood it literally, and abusing the figure of personification, have described the production of the world as if it was analogous to that of animal birth. The abuse is of very old date, and not confined to the Hindus. The mundane egg, the form in which, according to Manu, the rudiments of the world are first manifested, was not unknown, as you are well aware, to the ancient cosmogonies of Greece.

In whatever mode movement is imparted to the

first inert principle of things, the stages by which it evolves into the actual variety of perceptible forms are much the same in the different systems; the first product is intelligence; thence proceeds egotism, or the consciousness of individuality; thence come the senses; thence the rudiments of the objects of sense or the subtle elements, and from them the gross or perceptible elements ether, air, fire, water, earth are developed, and they are the compound ingredients of all visible and tangible form. A more particular detail may be found in the Sankhya Karika and Vishnu Purana.

The elements of forms thus developed from primary matter remain unaltered for a day of Brahmá; a tolerably long interval, 2,160,000,000 years. At the end of this period, Brahmá sleeps. The material forms which then occupy the world, and the lower spheres of the universe, are then consumed by fire; the fire is extinguished by mighty rains, and the globe becomes a shoreless ocean. The sages, the gods, the elements survive, and when Brahmá wakes and finds what mischief his slumbers have generated, he sets to work to repair it. With the materials ready to his hands, he remanufactures the earth and its inhabitants, and this is what is intended by secondary creation. This kind of creation is repeated daily during the 100 years of Brahmá's existence;—a term which cannot be expressed in mortal years by any of our scales of numeration, but which may be written with fifteen figures, or 311,040,000,000,000 years.

At the end of this term Brahmá himself expires, and with him die all the gods and holy sages, and all forms whatever retrograde successively into their

constituent elements, until the whole is finally merged into the single or double rudiment of being, universal spirit, or primary matter and primary spirit, according to the theories of the dualistic or non-dualistic philosophers. After a considerable interval, similar causes produce similar effects; nature and spirit are again in movement, the creation is renewed, and the universe thus eternally fluctuates between existence and non-existence, without any motive, without any end, that rational conjecture can guess at.

Upon the subject of the extravagant chronology of the Hindus it may be remarked, that the enormous periods of which it is composed are of a purely mythological character. The attempts that have been made to account for them on astronomical computations have led to no satisfactory results. How far they are analogous to similar extravagancies in the chronology of other nations of antiquity is also undetermined; the subject is only of importance as furnishing an additional argument against the authority of those works in which it is seriously affirmed as truth.

The philosophical systems take no notice of the creation of man except in the abstract: for the origin of the human race we must have recourse to other authorities, and particularly to the Puranas, in which various accounts of the occurrence are narrated. It is not difficult to detect, through all their embellishments and corruptions, the tradition of the descent of mankind from a single pair, however much they have disguised it by the misemployment of the figures of allegory and personification. The embodied creative attribute, the agent

in formal creation, Brahmá, is fabled to have divided himself into two creatures—one male, one female; from their union the first man and first woman were born, who married and begot children, and from them sprang not only mankind but all living creatures. This is the general outline of the mode in which it is related that the earth was peopled, and it is probably traceable to the Vedas; but the heroic poems and the Puranas have remodelled the tale in a variety of shapes, until it presents an incoherent and conflicting series of legends—not always very intelligible, and sometimes not very decent. I must refer for details to the Vishnu Purana.

The description of the phenomena of secondary creation includes an account of the disposition of the universe, of the different spheres or worlds, of the situation and size of the planets, and of the divisions of the earth. As long as the geography of the Hindus is restricted to India, it is sufficiently accurate; but as soon as it extends beyond those limits it is wholly fanciful and absurd. The Puranas distribute the earth into seven concentric circles or rings, each forming an annular continent, and being separated from the next in succession by a circumambient ocean. These oceans vary also as to their constituent parts; and besides seas of fresh and salt water, we have them of treacle, honey, milk, and wine. The whole is encompassed by a stupendous mountain belt, beyond which lies the region of darkness; and in the centre of all, which is also the centre of the continent we inhabit, towers Mount Meru, to the height of 64,000 miles. The astronomy is more moderate, but the mythologic or Pauranik astronomy is as incompatible with the

scientific astronomy of the Hindus as it is with the Copernican system. Much of the astronomy of the Hindus, properly so called, agrees with that of Europe, and advantage has judiciously been taken of the difference between the inventions of their Puranas and the facts of their astronomers to convict the former even by native testimony of absurdity and error. It is also through geography and astronomy that the first and strongest impressions have been made upon the minds of native youth who have received an English education: acquaintance with the extent and divisions of the earth, and with the leading phenomena of the heavens, however superficial, is fatal to all faith in the extravagances of the Puranas, and affixes discredit to whatever they inculcate.

Man being created and provided with a habitation, the next question to be considered is the object of his existence. For what is he designed? Final liberation. What that is understood to be I shall presently endeavour to explain; but it is necessary first to offer a few words respecting the mode in which it is imagined that the purposes of human life may be best effected. The social institutions of the Hindus appear to have originated with the Vedas, and present, as is well known, the characteristic peculiarity of the distinction of castes. The original scheme contemplates but four—the Brahman, whose duties were to study and teach the Vedas, and conduct the domestic worship of the next two classes. The Kshatriya was the warrior and prince, whose duties were to fight and govern. The Vaisya was the merchant and farmer. Both he and the soldier were enjoined to study, though not

permitted to teach the Vedas. The fourth caste, that of the Sudra, supplied artificers, labourers, and servants to the other three. The Sudras were subjected to much indignity and injustice, but their condition was never so bad as that of the Helot, the bondsman or the serf; they were free, masters of their own property, and at liberty to settle where they pleased. Intermarriages between all four castes took place, and the only check upon them was the degradation of the children. They were not even Sudras; they therefore formed new castes, distinguished according to their mixed descent and the occupation which came to be regarded as peculiarly their own. In the present day the only one of the original castes extant is the Brahman: the Kshatriya, Vaisya, and Sudra are extinct; and the innumerable castes which are now met with are in part the representatives of the ancient mixed castes, but in a still greater degree are the progeny of later times, and distinctions unauthorizedly assumed by the people themselves. For it is a great mistake to imagine that caste in India is either a burden or a disgrace. The notion is European, springing like many others out of the belief, that our own customs and feelings furnish an infallible standard by which to measure those of other nations. The fact is, that even with the most abject classes caste is a privilege, not a shame; and in proportion as the scale of society descends, so are the people more tenacious of their caste. Even the Mohammedans, to whose religion such a distinction is as uncongenial as it is to Christianity, imitate in India their Hindu countrymen in this particular, and pique themselves upon their caste. The principle of the distinction is of

course indefensible, and in some parts of India, or under particular circumstances, it is oppressively enforced. In practice, however, where European influence predominates, little more inconvenience results from it than from the distinctions of rank in the countries of Europe. The diligent discharge of the duties assigned to each caste is one of the means by which the members are prepared for the attainment of higher grades of perfection.

The period of life, of the three master castes, was divided into four portions or stages. The first, that of the student, was to be devoted to sacred study; the second, that of the householder, to the duties of active life; the third, that of the hermit, to solitude and contemplation; the fourth and last, that of the mendicant, to self-denial and abstraction. This distribution leaves, therefore, but one-fourth of existence for the offices of a householder, the father of a family, the citizen; and this is one respect in which the tendency of the Hindu system to depreciate active, social, and moral obligations is most mischievously manifested. It is not to be imagined that the Hindus are ignorant of the foundations of all morality, or that they do not value truth, justice, integrity, benevolence, charity to all that lives, and even the requital of evil with good. "The tree," says one of their familiar illustrations, "withholds not its shade from the woodman that is cutting it down." "The sandal-tree," says another, "communicates its fragrance to the hatchet that levels it with the ground." These duties are all repeatedly enjoined, and Hindu authorities commend as earnestly as those of any other language, and the people practice, in general, as much as most other people, the duties of

their social condition, filial piety, paternal tenderness, kindness to inferiors, and obedience to the king. These, however, as well as the duties of caste, and even devotional rites, are held to be only subordinate and preliminary obligations, steps leading towards perfection, but stopping at the threshhold, and to be cast away as soon as the interior of the temple is entered. All the obligations of social life do no more than qualify a man to abandon them: they are of no avail, they are impediments in his way when he undertakes to consummate the end of his being, when he would lose himself entirely in imperturbable meditation upon his own nature, by which alone he can know that he himself is one with the Divine nature, by which alone he can be identified with the universal soul, and emancipated for ever from the necessity of future existence.

Now it is true that in the present constitution of Indian society this distribution of the periods of life, beyond that of the student, is never regarded, except by a few, who prefer a life of lazy mendicity, or by some half-crazed enthusiast, who thinks it possible to realise the letter of the law. The great body of the people, Brahmans included, pursue their worldly avocations as long as their faculties permit, spend the decline of life in the bosom of their families, and die peaceably and decently at home. But although the practice is discontinued the doctrine remains, and influences opinion; and devotional ceremonies, pilgrimage, penance, and abstract contemplation, have an undue preponderance in the estimation of the people, even the best informed amongst them, over active duties and the precepts of morality. As to the common people, they have,

as I indicated in my last, a still lower scale, and they find already substitute for the inconveniences of all moral restraint in the fervour of that faith which they place in Vishnu, and the unwearied perseverance with which they train a parrot or a starling to repeat his names, to articulate Krishna-Radha, or Sita-Ram.

What then are the consequences which the Hindus propose to themselves from the fulfilment of any description of prescribed duties or acts of merit? Those who profess devoted attachment to a popular deity expect to be rewarded by elevation to the heaven in which he is supposed to dwell, and to reside there for ever in ecstatic communication or union with him. These notions, however, are innovations; and even the independent establishments, the several heavens of these divinities, are modern contrivances. The heaven of Krishna, Go-loka, the sphere or heaven of cows, has grown out of the legends of his boyhood, whilst straying amongst the pastures of Vruj. There is no such place in the celestial topography of the Vedas, or of the most genuine of the Puranas.

According to what appears to be the most ancient and authentic theory of the future state of man, punctual performance of religious rites, with due attention to moral conduct, and entire belief in the holiness of the Vedas, secured for the soul after death a period of enjoyment proportioned to the quantum of moral and religious merit of the deceased, in the heaven of Indra; a kind of Elysium. Neglect of prescribed rites and duties, irreverence for the Brahmans, and disbelief in the Vedas, incurred punishment for a given term, proportionate to the crime,

in various hells, or regions of Tartarus. At the expiration of a limited period, the soul, which in either of its destinations had continued to be invested with a subtile and ethereal, but material and sensible body, returns to earth, and is born again, in union with some gross and elemental body, according to the former merits or demerits of the individual, as a reptile, a fish, a bird, a beast, a giant, a spirit, a divinity, until, after sundry migrations, it ascends or descends to man, to undergo a similar career.

Now this, I may remark, is what the Hindus understand by Fate. They do not understand it to depend upon the Divine foreknowledge of what a man will be, or will do, conformably to which he must act and must be; nor is it, in their opinion, an irresistible impulse given to his career, which he cannot choose but obey. It is the result of conduct in a previous existence, the consequences of which are necessarily suffered in a succeeding life. A man is poor, miserable, diseased, unfortunate, not because it was so predestined, not because it was so ordained from the beginning of time, but because he was ignorant, negligent, profligate, irreligious in a former life, and is now paying the penalty of his follies and his sins. He cannot change his actual condition, but he is so far master of his own fate, that by now leading a life of innocence and piety, he will secure his being born again to a better and a happier lot.

The consequences of acts, whether moral or devotional, being thus, in the estimation of all classes of Hindus, temporary and transient, the philosophical schools have made it their especial aim

to determine by what means a career so precarious and uneasy may be cut short. For it is a remarkable circumstance in the history of Hindu opinion, that, amidst the many varieties of practice and collisions of belief that have from time to time prevailed in India, it does not seem to have occurred to any individual, learned or unlearned, heterodox or orthodox, to call in question the truth of the Metempsychosis. It is not only the one point on which all are agreed, it is the one point which none have ever disputed. Even the Buddhist, who denies every other essential dogma of the Brahmanical religion, adopts, without demurring, as an article of his creed, the transmigration of the soul. It is, as you know, a doctrine of remote antiquity, and it still reigns despotic, without any sign of decrepitude or decay, over the minds of the nations of the extreme east, over Burman, Chinese, Tartar, Tibetan, and Indian; over perhaps the most numerous portion of the human race; over at least six or seven hundred millions of mankind.

Adopting, then, this unquestioned dogma as the basis of their argument, all the philosophical schools propose for their object the ascertainment of those means by which the wanderings of the soul may be arrested, its transitions through all the painful vicissitudes of corporeal existence be terminated, and its emancipation from bodily imprisonment and degradation be effected for ever. This is what is termed *Moksha*, or *Mukti* — Liberation, emancipation. All the systems agree that this devoutly desirable consummation is to be accomplished only through that knowledge which they profess to teach; not literature, not science, not

morality, not devotion, but true knowledge; knowledge, obtained by profound contemplation, of the true nature of the soul, and of the universe; when the contemplatist can say, with perfect conviction, and with truth, I am Brahma, I am all that is, I am one with God. The absolute state of the soul thus liberated is nowhere clearly defined; it ceases to transmigrate; it loses all bodily individuality; it loses all spiritual individuality, as whether, with the Vedanta, we consider it to be reunited with, or absorbed into, the Supreme Spirit, or whether, with the Sánkhyas, we hold it to be commingled with the spiritual element of the universe, individual spirit ceases to exist. Annihilation, then, as regards individuals, is as much the ultimate destiny of the soul as it is of the body, and "Not to be" is the melancholy result of the religion and philosophy of the Hindus.

I have thus attempted to place before you some of the principal features of the religious practices and opinions of the Hindus, to which it is fit that your attention should be directed in engaging in any investigation of their nature. To have entered more fully into detail would have occupied too much of your time, and particulars will be easily multiplied by inquiry. With the minor incidents of the popular superstition it is not necessary to encumber the argument farther than they are countenanced by authorities considered sacred. That learned Brahmans will readily admit the unauthorized introduction, and the unprofitable and degrading tendency of much of the popular practice, is not unlikely, as I have before stated; and their indifference is likely to be the chief obstacle to their acknowledging the

inefficiency and evil of much even of that which is authorized. They are likely to adhere to their speculative tenets, and particularly to those regarding the nature and condition of the soul, with more tenacious obstinacy. Dependence on authority, veneration for antiquity, pride of learning, confidence in argument, and disdain of defeat, will combine with the inherent difficulties of the controversy to oppose the influence of reason in generating conviction in the minds of the Pundits. Still there is no occasion to despair. Besides that encouragement which a firm trust in the omnipotence of truth inspires, we may derive animation and hope from the history of the past.

It will not have escaped your observation, that in all the most important speculations upon the nature of the Supreme Being and man, upon matter and spirit, the Hindus traverse the very same ground that was familiarly trodden by the philosophers of Greece and Rome, and pursue the same ends by the same or similar paths. The result was equally impotent; but what it more concerns us to remark is, that all these speculations—all the specious systems of philosophers, at once acute and profound—all the plausible and graceful illustrations of the most prolific ingenuity—all the seemingly substantial combinations of intellectual powers still unsurpassed, were divested of their speciousness, despoiled of their beauty, deprived of all by which they held reason captive, and shewn to be fallacious and false by the Ithuriel spear of Christian truth. The weapons, which wielded by the first defenders of that truth discomfited these delusions, are in your hands.

Have they lost their efficacy, or have you not the skill, the courage to employ them?

It is however to be recollected, that agreeably to the invitation of the Bishop of Calcutta, an impression upon the minds of learned natives, that is, upon Pundits, Brahmans learned only in Sanscrit learning is only a contingency. The argument is to be addressed in the first instance, to English-reading natives, to natives who have been educated in the language of our country, and in the learning of Europe. There are many such at the chief cities of the British Indian empire. In Calcutta they are in great numbers, perhaps thousands, and they are of various descriptions. The greater number have only such knowledge of English as qualifies them for public employment, and they rarely concern themselves with matters of controversy. Some very good native English scholars continue orthodox, nay even bigoted Hindus. They are generally however men of mature years who studied English in early life, when they were taught little else than words. Some who are familiar with our language are amongst the leading members of the society instituted by Rammohun Roy, to which I have already alluded; a much greater number consist of young men whose English education is more recent, and has been conducted on an improved and more effective plan, which proposes to give an English tone to their feelings and principles, as well as to communicate parts of speech. Many of these write English, not only with facility but with elegance: they are familiar with our standard authors, are possessed of an extent of general information, which few young men even in England

at the same age surpass, and have learned to think and feel on many important subjects more like natives of the west than of the east. These have almost all become Seceders in different degrees from the religion of their fathers. They have not however yet adopted a better. The last description of English scholars is a branch from that just specified, and consists of a few who have read, reflected, reasoned, and believed. One of them, Kristo Mohan Banerji, a young man of very excellent ability and attainments, by birth a Brahman of the most respectable rank, is an ordained minister of the English church in Calcutta.

It is the advantage of those English scholars who halt yet between two opinions, who have no religion at all, that the work to which competition has been invited, is calculated in the first instance to promote. The feeling with which most of them regard Hinduism is favourable to conviction, and it might be supposed, that as they have already disavowed allegiance to it, they require not to be enlightened as to its errors and evils; but this would be a mistake. Their English education has left them no opportunity of native education, and they know almost as little of what they abandon as what they decline to accept. It is not possible to depend upon the durability of impressions, taken up from a wish perhaps to get rid of inconvenient restrictions, or from the vanity of being thought wiser than others, rather than from a rational estimate of the defects of a system grounded upon a knowledge of that system. By placing those defects clearly before them, they will become more aware of their existence and character, and their conviction will be

rational and permanent. They will also be able to defend their conviction, perhaps to communicate it to others. At present truth derives not that benefit even from its professed votaries, which they might easily be in a position to render. The mere native English scholar has no common debateable ground on which to contend with his learned countrymen. The contemptuous answer of the Brahman to his objections is, "You know nothing about the matter—you understand not the language of the Sástras—you are unacquainted with their contents—you are not qualified to impugn them." If his adversary can shew that he is conversant with the system, he will acquire the right of being listened to, and he will possibly not be listened to wholly in vain. When too at the same time that he is supplied with valid reasons for his own departure from the national superstitions, he is furnished with arguments and inducements to seek shelter from his own uneasy undulations of opinion in the harbour of Christian certainty, it may be hoped that he will not only contribute to win his countrymen from their errors, by laying bare their enormity, but that he will afford in his own person an example and a guide to the adoption of a pure and holy system of belief.

It is recommended that with a view to the translation of the proposed Essay, it should be written in the form of a dialogue. The writers are not to understand by this a mere succession of question and answer, or a keen encounter of wit, or even the more equally maintained discussion of which the works of Cicero and Plato furnish classical models. In the style in which the Puranas for instance, are written, a disciple, or one seeking for information,

puts a leading question which furnishes a text on which his teacher or instructor dilates, or he suggests a difficulty or hints an objection, which is thereupon attempted to be solved or answered at length.

To those who may undertake the task I have one caution to offer. Let whatever they urge be urged in charity.

It is natural to feel impatient of error—it is difficult not to feel indignant with wickedness; but, in instituting a discussion into the truth or falsehood of a religious creed, with the hope of demonstrating the latter to the assent of those by whom it is professed, we have not in view the expression of our own feelings, but a kindly influence over theirs—we are not contending for victory but for conviction—we seek not to humble or incense our adversaries, but to conciliate their confidence and direct their judgment—we seek to work a salutary change in their principles, and in this we shall most assuredly fail if we commence the operation by disregarding their prejudices and provoking their resentment. The Hindu is not resentful—not unconfiding—not disinclined to discussion—not incapable of appreciating kindness—at the same time he is sensitive and timid. Treat him rudely, harshly, intemperately, it is like touching the leaf of the mimosa; he shrinks from all contest—he adopts the course recommended by his authorities to the man in quest of true knowledge—he imitates the tortoise who retracts his limbs beneath his shell, and is then alike indifferent to the sunshine or the storm. Let the argument, then, be enforced in a spirit of benevolence—let it be a calm and conciliating appeal to the understanding of in-

telligent men, and, although it may fail of producing any immediate or ostensible effect, it will not in all likelihood have been wholly unprofitable. Important changes in the opinions of nations are not the work of a day. Many and repeated and long continued efforts are necessary for their consummation, and many causes of little apparent magnitude, and of no immediately observable agency, cooperate for their accomplishment. It is not the earthquake or the tempest only that rives asunder the mountain barriers of the Himalaya, and opens its steep recesses to man and to cultivation. The smallest rill that trickles from the eternal snow contributes to swell the torrents, which, bursting through the rocks, transform declivities into valleys, and precipices into paths, and finally descend a stately river to fertilize the plains of Hindustan.

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